

In Which Eleven Catches the Flu by the-singular-peep

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Summary: For Eleven, it had been all sterile walls, white floors, and vaccinations. She had never been exposed to illness, at least not the physical kind, and she was not prepared for what her first bout of the Flu will feel like. She feels miserable. Hopper feels terrified. [IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS OKAY SERIES. COMPLETE. PART 2/?. P1: "IN WHICH HOPPER CHANGES THE SHEETS."]

In Which Eleven Catches the Flu

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February 2, 1984. Wednesday.

"Mmph."

Hopper rolled over, not paying any attention to the little noise he heard from his doorway.

"*Mmph.*" It said again, more forcefully.

Hopper pushed the pillow over his ears and burrowed slightly more into his covers. It was warm, and it wasn't covered with syrup and Legos like the rest of his house. He liked it in there.

"Aaa," The voice said again, and Hopper accepted his fate, beginning to open his eyes. That was the voice of a grumpy little girl who Hopper had no doubt was glaring at him from the doorway. Was it seven AM already?

"What's up, kid?" He groaned, squinting towards the doorway, one eye all scrunched up and the other barely open. First he saw the clock.

Not seven AM, but three AM.

And then he saw the grumpy little girl, who was standing in the doorway wrapped head to toe in blankets like a little burrito.

"Eleven, what the he**?" Hopper grunted, sitting up on his elbow. "It's three in the fu**ing morning."

"Mm." She said in response, and began to move towards Hopper's bed. "Feel funny."

"Funny how, chief?" He sighed. Hopper actually opened his eyes all the way this time, and really took in the way his housemate looked. It took him a minute to piece together what was going on. The dark circles. The flushed cheeks. The gaping mouth. He sat up fully then

and looked straight at Eleven. She shrugged, and Hopper could see her lip quiver.

"*Funny*." She insisted, and pulled the blanket tight around her shoulders. "Cold. Heavy." She pointed to her stomach. "Bad," and then to her nose, "No breathe," and then to her head, "Ow."

She waited a moment, before adding on, "Dying."

As dire as this situation might be, Hopper almost let out a laugh.

"No no no, not *dying*. *Sick*. Just sick, that's all." He smiled, taking a deep breath as he stood and faced the cold with his bare stomach and legs. He yanked on a shirt so he wouldn't be walking around in *just* his boxers, and Eleven coughed. It was harsh and deep in her chest, and she whined a little afterwards. "C'mon, bugger. Let's take your temperature."

Hopper would be lying if he said he wasn't scared. With all this kid's been through, and he was sure he barely knew the half of it, this could be tough.

He*1, with all *he's* been through, this could be tough.

He pushed that thought out of his mind and tousled her hair at the door. "Come with me, kid. Nothing I can do with you all the way over there."

He heard her little feet pattering behind him and yawned. Maybe he would get some sleep if he could get her back down first. He stopped and opened the tiny utility closet door, beginning to rummage through it for the thermometer.

"What is sick?" He heard her mumble, and he didn't stop his search.

"Sick is when you feel bad. Like when you're tired or hurting or some shi-" He stopped himself. Censored himself like he hadn't thought to do earlier. "Some stuff like that. You take medicine and rest up to get it to stop so you feel better again."

Silence.

"Like home from work? You say tired and take white..." Eleven paused, struggling to think of the word. "med-i-cine to stop hurt?"

Hopper chuckled.

"Nah, I'm not sick then, kid. Just exhausted. Sick is when you're even more exhausted than that. Like you are."

Hopper knelt down to Eleven's height and motioned for her to open her mouth. She did so and he stuck the thermometer in. "Make sure this is under your tongue, yeah? It's gonna tell me how sick you are."

He waited a moment, thinking. This could be bad. If she needed to be hospitalized, he had no way to do that. If she had a disease, he couldn't cure her. If she was -

Stop.

Breathe.

Best just to evaluate how she's feeling now. He'll cross the other bridge when he gets there.

"If one is how you feel when...He*1, when you eat eggos, and ten is how you felt in the bath last November, how are you now? What number?"

Eleven thought.

She felt awful. Her head was throbbing, and her throat felt tickly, and she couldn't breathe out of her nose. Her limbs were wobbly, and she felt sweaty and her stomach kept doing flips like it would jump right out of her mouth if she opened it.

But she wasn't upset. Hopper was right here; he was taking care of her, and she was in a blanket and not out in the cold, and she was wearing little star pajamas that made her feel cozy and happy and safe, and so she wasn't that bad. She held up three fingers, because nothing could be as good as eating eggos, she wasn't feeling perfect, but she was happy enough. Three was good.

"Just three?" Hopper raised an eyebrow before the thermometer

beeped. He took it from the girl's mouth and looked at it. "Think a little higher. You're at 103, kid." The blank expression in her clouded eyes told him to elaborate. "That's pretty bad."

She frowned, her hazy eyes looking right past Hopper and not making eye contact. Her shoulders slumped, and she coughed, big, loud, and heavy without covering her mouth.

"Don't feel good."

Hopper sighed.

"No wonder. How about we get you back to bed, huh? I can get you something to drink, maybe something to eat if you want it, but that's... That's it for right now. I'll go out on the way to work and see what else I can get you." He tried to sound hopeful and not worried, but in reality he was worried. Very worried. 103 was high for a child as small as she was. And her voice was much deeper than it should be. And her knees were wobbling so much he wasn't sure if she could stand much longer.

He reached out and caught her before she hit the ground.

"Woah, there, little lady. Come on." He picked her up, putting a leg on either side of his torso and cupping her back and bottom, careful not to hold her bridal style - he knew from experience she would become stressed and plagued with those awful memories if he did. She leaned her head onto his neck, and he winced. She was *burning*.

Carefully, Hopper put the girl back on her bed. She clung to him like a koala bear, her legs and arms tightening around his neck and back, and she made little whimpering noises.

"No, no," She whined. She was trying to hold on, but her grip faltered and she slipped onto her bed. Hopper saw the beginnings of tears in her deep brown eyes and could tell she was frightened. He knew that high fever could cause paranoia. He knew that from experience, too. And so he sat on the bed next to her and grasped her hand in his own.

"Hey there, kid. Hey. I'm not goin' anywhere. Alright? You're safe. I'm

right here with you, and I won't let anything happen." He paused a minute and grimaced. He knew he needed to try and get her strength up. "Actually, do you want something to eat? Some water maybe?"

Eleven made a face, but Hopper ignored it. He reached down and lifted her up again, grimacing at the crackling sound his back made when he straightened. He moved into the living room and plopped her onto the couch, shushing her as she began to breathe heavily.

"I'm just going to the kitchen, girlie. Just right over here, no need to cry, I'm two feet away." He kept glancing back at her as he moved into the kitchen, making sure to stay within sight. He opened the fridge. "You want some Eggos? I know it's kind of early for breakfast, but..."

He knew she needed something more. She was weak. Carbs didn't fix that. But, then again, she was sick, and being sick meant, for a kid anyways, lying at home, watching cartoons, and eating your favorite foods. And she needed sustenance, even if it was three am. He heard her sniff.

"Eggos." She said, but she didn't sound very sure. Still, Eggos were better than nothing and so he took the box out of the fridge and took two of the waffles out, putting them straight into the toaster.

Within seven minutes, Hopper had filled a glass with tap water and ice, had put the now-toasted waffles on a plate, and was sitting next to his girl on the couch.

"You gotta eat something." He coaxed, setting the plate and glass beside him and leaning over to help Eleven sit. She flopped up with his hand, barely putting forth any effort at all. All her weight was on his hand, but he couldn't seem to mind. He reached out with his other and took the plate of waffles, setting it in Eleven's lap.

"Eat." He said. She reached out with a shaky hand and picked up a waffle before looking up at Hopper with pleading eyes. She didn't look well.

"Please, Eleven. You need to eat something. He**, if you want something else I'll get it for you, but you gotta get your strength up."

Eleven looked at her waffle, then looked at Hopper, then back to her waffle. She then took a tiny nibble and placed it back on the plate. She made a face.

"Feel funny." She said again, a pout on her lips. Hopper sighed and grabbed her water, holding it out.

"Drink."

She shook her head.

"Feel funny," She reiterated.

Oh, sh*t.

"You gonna throw up on me, kid?"

Eleven looked confused for a brief moment before her eyes squeezed shut. She gave a little cough that sounded more like a sob as she leaned forward.

"Okay, yep, you are, c'mon, let's go, up, up, up,"

Eleven didn't know what was happening other than that it was *bad*. She had never felt quite this bad before, and it was strange. She had heard Mike talk about being *Sick*, over the radio. He explained that he was sick, and that that meant his throat hurt and he couldn't talk much.

But Eleven didn't feel like that, not quite.

Her throat *did* hurt, that was true. But her eyes felt watery and itchy, too, like she wanted to scratch at them until they fell out and *stopped*. And she had this weird tickle in her throat that made her want to cough and cough and cough so that it would go away. And her nose was dripping. *Everywhere*. She couldn't seem to get it to stop. And - and her tummy felt funny, like she had eaten too much, or like she was nervous, but she wasn't because she hadn't eaten since lunch the day before and there was no reason to be nervous. Hopper told her that was because she was full of *mucus*, and that *mucus* could make you *throw up*. Eleven didn't have the energy to ask what those words

meant yet, and so she filed them away in the back of her mind and just leaned against him where they sat in front of the toilet. She didn't quite know why they were there, but Hopper was letting her sit in his lap and lean on him, and he was petting her hair, so she didn't mind.

"We can't sit here all day, girlie." Hopper said gently, lifting Eleven's chin with his fingers. She wouldn't meet his gaze, and he felt how hot her skin was in his hands. Panic shot through him, but he pushed it down as much as he could. "Just go on and get it over with. You'll feel better if you do. There's no use in just sitting here in this nasty bathroom."

Eleven didn't know what he was *talking* about. If there was no use, then why were they sitting here anyways? She started to stand up, because apparently sitting in here was no use, and maybe that meant it was *stupid*. But as she stood, she started to feel... funny.

A not good funny.

A *bad* funny.

She whined, just a small bit, and her hands instinctively went to her tummy. She didn't know what was going on. Could she be hungry? Her tummy twisted painfully again, and she bit back a whimper. Hopper sighed from his place on the floor where he sat criss-cross, his chin resting on his hand.

"It's alright," He tried, failing utterly to soothe.

Eleven didn't even hear him. Her stomach was gurgling, an unpleasant sensation that left her feeling tingly all over, and her legs felt wobbly, like how they felt after she ran as fast as she could from the lab.

She didn't *like* it.

She whined again, and this time noticed that her mouth was starting to water.

"C'mon, kid," Hopper sighed, thinking maybe she wanted privacy, and Eleven felt a hand on her back. It barely processed. "I can leave if you

need me to."

Almost instantly, without missing a beat, Eleven felt her stomach convulse and it made her curl in on herself where she was standing. She barely heard Hopper say, "Oh, sh*t!" as he flung the toilet lid open and moved to steady her. And then she was on her knees, and a painful substance was coming from inside her and it was *everywhere*. She began to cry as her stomach convulsed again and more came up, and she began to sob as it happened a *third* time. It felt as if every muscle in her body was crumpling, like they were all going to curl so tightly in on themselves that Eleven would die. She didn't like that thought, and as soon as she had it she felt her body convulse again - but with something different than illness. She was crying, sobbing in earnest, and her sobs were *loud*. She was nearly screaming in her tears, and Hopper couldn't help but feel *awful*.

His housemate - his *girl*, one not quite as close to his heart as Sara, but getting there - was leaned over the toilet bowl, gripping it for dear life. She was sobbing so much that tears had soaked her face entirely, and snot was dripping from her nostrils all the way past her lips. And then there was the vomit - Eleven had missed, ever so slightly as she fell to her knees, and now the foul substance was all over her lips, her hands, the lid of the seat and a little bit on the floor beside her. After a few moments, there was something new entirely to the situation - blood.

Blood was dripping freely from her nose, and now even her ears were starting up as she vomited again, and every item in the room began to knock around. Their toothbrushes fell to the ground, and the shower curtain tugged itself right off the curtain rod, and the shaving cream fell off the counter and spurted a little onto the ground, landing a bit on Eleven's socked foot. She was covered, in all kinds of mess, and Hopper could do nothing but watch as she threw up what had to be the last of her stomach's contents. He patted her back and rubbed it and held her hair out of her face and did everything he used to do with Sara as Eleven cried and cried, and eventually, she began to settle.

The blood didn't stop.

"Hey, shh, shh, you're alright," Hopper tried as Eleven leaned shakily

back against him, seemingly against her will. She was feeling a little better, now - at least her tummy was. She was grateful, but also scared. Actually, terrified. "You just threw up, baby, you're okay,"

She looked up at Hopper with hazy, clouded up eyes and he barely was able to hide his grimace at the mess covering her face from top to bottom. "You missed a little there, kiddo,"

He didn't miss her lip beginning to quiver, and quickly tried to avert the situation.

"Hey, no, no tears, I'm not mad." Eleven looked up at him again.

"P-promise?" She whispered, and her voice was hoarse and crackled as she spoke. Hopper smiled and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"Promise. And I also promise that you have got to be cleaned up. Right now."

Eleven looked down and frowned. She noted that there was blood all down the front of her shirt, and she put a hand to her nose to check, and then one to her ears. Yes, that was where it came from. She also saw how damp her clothes were, and she wasn't quite sure if it was from sweat or tears or a mix of both. Finally - and most regretfully - she noticed the viscous liquid that had stung her throat was staining the cuffs of her shirt, and she felt big, crocodile tears well up in her eyes. These were her *favorite pajamas*, and the stain was less than becoming. It was an odd, unappetizing shade of *orange*, and it smelled yucky and it made her stomach churn just looking at it again. However, before bringing

up the fact that her clothes were soiled, something was more important. She frowned and looked at Hopper, a question burning the back of her mind. A *fear*.

"Dying?" She asked softly as Hopper started to stand up, lifting her with him.

"Nah, kid. No. Not dying." He set her shakily onto her own two feet, and she gripped his shirt before her knees could give. "You just threw up, that's all. Kids do that when they get sick."

"Star pajamas." Eleven said sadly, looking down at her clothes. Hopper followed her gaze.

"Don't worry about it. Tell you what." Hopper squatted to where he was a little shorter than Eleven, and she had to look down to make eye contact. "Why don't you go ahead and take those off, okay? I'll... I'll go grab your towel, and I'll go start 'em up in the washer real quick. I'll start you a bath, too, and you can go ahead and wash up."

Eleven began to take off her shirt before Hopper had even left, ignoring *privacy*, and struggled to get it off over her head. She felt a little better, now. In fact, her tummy felt better completely. But everything else did not. Her head was absolutely throbbing now, even worse than before, and she couldn't seem to breathe out of her nose, and her head felt *heavy*, like it would fall off if she moved too much. She didn't feel well at all, but she wasn't *throwing up*, so that was okay. She threw her shirt in the floor and steadied herself against the wall when something else strange overtook her body without her permission.

A great, hearty, **loud** sneeze ripped through her body, and she convulsed forward with it, whipping her curls around and dizzying her. And then she heard Hopper shout, but she didn't worry about it. He didn't sound hurt. Instead she sniffed and wiped at her nose with her hand, frowning when she remembered that it would come back covered in blood and snot and *throw up*, and started to work at getting her pants off.

Hopper was caught completely off guard by every glass in the cupboard falling out at him at full force.

He was standing in the kitchen, fixing Eleven a cup of water, because after that Linda Blair act she pulled, she probably needed it. He was standing in the kitchen, in front of the sink, tap on, when all of a sudden every glass in their inventory began to slide with a startling jolt out of the cupboard.

He moved faster than he had in the past 25 years to catch as many glasses as he could in his arms, and he was very proud to say that he only missed two.

But he was still *confused as he***. Was there a miniature earthquake? He highly doubted it, and was still pondering when he remembered the blood. Uh oh. Eleven.

"Hey, Ellie?" He said cautiously, walking with the single glass of water back to the bathroom. He made a slight detour, to grab the promised towel, before peeking his head into the bathroom. "Eleven?"

She was sitting on the tub, dressed only in the slightly-too-big pink panties that had come out of a dollar store pack Hopper purchased a few months ago, shaking a little bit. Blood streamed out of her nose and ears, and was covering her shoulders now. Her eyes were hazy, unfocused, and it looked like just breathing was causing her a great deal of trouble. He could see the remnants of vomit on her face and hands, and the traces of tears cutting through the blood and bile. She didn't look well at all, but at least she wasn't puking her guts out anymore. He noticed the water was on in the tub, but she didn't look like she was about to get in.

"You okay, kid?" Hopper asked cautiously. Eleven looked up suddenly, as if taken from a trance, and it looked as if she were about to speak.

But then, with three heavy breaths and her shoulders raising a little, she sneezed. It was a sound too great to be expected from such a small child, and as it happened snot shot out of her nose as well as large amounts of blood, but that wasn't all.

Every roll of toilet paper, glass bobble, and bottle of soap from the shelves in the room fell violently to the ground with a great *thud*. She sneezed again, even more harsh, and Hopper could practically hear it scraping her sore throat as more snot and blood came, and even more items fell and shattered from around the room. He quickly moved to shield his mostly naked little girl from it, and as he did she sneezed a third time, and this time the entire room shook, or at least, every item in it did.

With this third sneeze, the greatest and most painful sounding of the bunch, there was a large surge in power. The lights flickered, items fell, and -

The bath faucet shot right out of the wall and hit the other side, cracking the tile the tiniest bit.

"Holy sh*t!" Hopper breathed, and Eleven moaned against his chest. He let go the slightest bit, now kneeling down in front of her. She looked *awful*.

"Mmm," She groaned, and sniffed a great sniff trying to breathe. She breathed back out hurriedly, from her nose, because apparently something had tickled it. Hopper grimaced a little at the mess, but hid it well, instead reaching over to the toilet and grabbing a few squares of toilet paper.

"Go on and blow your nose, kid," He said, holding it out to her. Eleven just stared, and Hopper sighed for what felt like the ten thousandth time that day. He just simply couldn't believe how sheltered she had been - how many things she wasn't exposed to. He put the paper up to her nose and pinched the slightest bit.

"Blow."

She obeyed, and Hopper took the tissue from her when she finished, wadding it and tossing it in the waste basket. "Any better?"

Eleven shrugged, and Hopper frowned at how pink her cheeks were under the sick on her face. He had to fix this.

"Alright, girlie. I'm gonna.. See if I can fix this. You think you can handle grabbing a washcloth from under the sink?" Hopper gestured to the broken faucet, and Eleven nodded, slow and sure. Within ten minutes, Hopper had the faucet fixed (after being thoroughly soaked), the washing machine started, and the bath filled. He turned off the water and turned to Eleven who was sitting cross legged in the floor, her feverish face leaned heavily upon Hopper's leg.

"All done," He said, standing from his place on the edge of the tub. She startled a little, sitting up, and Hopper assumed that she had fallen asleep. "Now its a little cold, because we gotta get that fever down, but it's not too bad." Hopper stuck his hand in the tub, just for good measure. It was lukewarm, not too cold but not too hot either. "I'll be right out here in the living room, okay?"

Eleven looked up at him and frowned. She looked afraid, just a little, and she shied away from the tub, her shoulders going up to her ears. Hopper gave her a look.

"What?"

Eleven whined a little, and instantly Hopper got it.

Of *course*.

It was a *bath*.

"Not alone..." Eleven whimpered, barely audible as her lower lip went into the tiniest pout. Hopper knelt to her level quickly.

"Hey, shh, shh, it's alright. I'm not gonna make you find anybody, or go to that place again, or anything. It's just a bath. A normal, get yourself cleaned up bath." Eleven looked up at him with those big brown eyes, and he sighed. "If you need me to, I'll stay with you, okay? How's that sound?"

Eleven nodded enthusiastically, but stopped when she realized how it was making the feeling in her tummy come back the slightest bit. "Please."

And so he did. He stood carefully at her side and let her balance on him as she stepped into the warm water, and he stayed seated right beside the tub on the floor as she bathed.

"Here, let me help," He said softly, reaching over to her with a wash rag. She was having trouble cleaning her face. Hopper gently scrubbed the vomit from her chin and the tear streaks from her cheeks, but stopped when he noticed the blood.

The blood still hadn't stopped, and Hopper held his breath as Eleven wiped at it with her hand.

"I'm all good." She said, repeating the phrase she had heard Hopper say many times before when he was very obviously *not* all good. However, Hopper said nothing, instead making a mental note to keep a very close eye on that.

If the bleeding didn't stop, she could pass out.

If it still didn't stop, she could need a blood transfusion.

If she needed a blood transfusion, she had to go to the hospital.

She couldn't go to the hospital.

Hopper pulled the emergency break on his train of thought manually and took a very deep breath. He couldn't jump to conclusions. Not right now.

As Eleven finished her bath and was falling asleep in the rapidly cooling water, Hopper got a towel down and held it out for her, so she could step out and wrap herself in it.

He was fully aware that she was twelve years old and much too old to be babied like this, but he couldn't bring himself to care. Eleven was different than most. She was a little more needy, and would pick up habits usually intended for younger children, but only when she felt comfortable letting her guard down. If she didn't, she could take care of herself better than a full grown man with a full length beard and muscles bigger than a gallon bottle of Coke. And, as Hopper knew from experience, it was rare to catch her with her guard down. Surprisingly enough, her guard was down currently, and she cuddled into the towel and shut her eyes, swaying a little on her feet. He knew she was twelve, or at the very least almost twelve, but he also knew how different her thought process was than other twelve year olds'. And that was okay.

"You wanna head back to bed?" Hopper asked, glancing fleetingly at the clock. Sheesh. Four fifteen AM. They had been up for an hour and fifteen minutes, and he had to be up for work in three hours. Maybe if he could get her back down comfortably, he could get a quick nap before heading out. Not that he wanted to leave her at home, not like this.

Eleven shrugged.

"I would like to have more blankets, please." She said softly, and Hopper almost chuckled. He knew she understood full sentences, and

understood how to put them together, but he also knew how much she hated doing that. Eleven was unique, and she very much preferred to communicate nonverbally, even if technically she understood the complexities of the English language. Well. Some of them. About half. Less than half.

She could talk a little, and that's what he supposed he was getting at. She could talk a little, but she preferred to talk a whole lot less, and Hopper was very amused and interested as to why she decided to use a complete sentence here. He almost laughed, but then.. Then he realized why she was being so formal. She was used to only being rewarded with basic necessities when she did well. When she excelled. She knew Hopper was teaching her words. She knew he wanted to help her talk. She thought he would only keep her warm if she asked using what she was taught. The thought made him sick.

"You can talk however you want, you know that?" Hopper said softly, and he knelt in front of her to warm her arms with his hands. He scrubbed gently up and down on her bicep over the towel, looking keenly at eyes that didn't meet his.

"Cold." She said, and he didn't miss the way her lip quivered just a little. "Please?" She added, and he hated how she made eye contact, because that was something they had been working on, too. He made a mental note to stop pushing that one. At all.

"C'mon." He walked out of the open door and frowned at how cold the house was. With a fever *and* this weather, it was no wonder she was freezing. He walked maybe five more feet before he realized she wasn't following. He turned back, and she was standing in the doorway wrapped in the towel, shivering and looking at her feet.

"What?" He said, concern showing in his voice. He looked at her and furrowed his brow. "You gonna puke again?"

Eleven sighed, a heavy sigh that showed her annoyance in not understanding simple terms. "Puke?" She asked, and Hopper grimaced at how raspy her voice was.

"Throw up. You feel like you're gonna throw up, kid?"

Eleven shrugged.

They sat at the toilet for what seemed like hours, but in reality it was only thirty more minutes. Eleven didn't like the fact that even after *throwing up*, after doing that awful thing so many times, the feeling in her tummy just kept coming back. She kept count. That was thirteen different times her stomach had convulsed, and five times leaning over the toilet bowl. Three times she had heard Hopper curse. Four different times she had started to sob, and leaned back into Hopper's warm embrace. Twice he had reached up with toilet paper to wipe her face of vomit and the blood that was still dripping at a slow pace. She did not count how many objects she heard fall down around the house, because there were too many. She didn't know how to stop her brain from shaking everything just a little bit.

After the fifth time she leaned over, and after her stomach convulsed three more times, she leaned back and breathed heavily. She felt lighter now, even though her entire body was tingly and weak, and did not feel like she would be sick again, because the last two convulsions had not even brought anything up. She was empty, and she felt it. Empty of food, empty of water, empty of even *feeling*. All she wanted was to go to sleep. She turned to face Hopper, and he sighed a sad, sad sigh.

"You alright, baby girl?" He asked. Eleven thought, hard and long, and then she nodded. She was alright.

"All good." She said. Hopper nodded and stood, grabbing a washcloth from the basket above the toilet and taking it to the sink. He wet it with cool water before crouching by Eleven again.

"I'm going to wipe your face, yeah?" He said softly, making sure she knew what he was doing. She gave a little grunt of confirmation, and he gently cleaned the blood and vomit from her face.

"You don't feel like you're going to throw up anymore?"

Eleven nodded. Her tummy finally felt better, in an odd way. It felt empty, but that was better than the nasty feeling it had earlier. She nodded a second time. "Yes."

"Alright then, kiddo. You wanna get back in bed?"

Hopper saw her nod before he looked again at the clock. Four forty five. He**. He had to be up in two hours, give or take some. Accepting his fate, he moved to the sink and wet Eleven's toothbrush before putting the minty paste on it. He held it out to her, and she cocked her head.

"This will get the nasty taste out of your mouth."

Eleven nodded and took the brush, and as she started cleaning her teeth Hopper walked over to the laundry basket and began looking for his daughter a change of clothes. He settled on a pair of superman underwear (some she had seen on the TV and asked if he would *please* get for her) and white long-sleeved floor length nightgown that would keep her warm. He grabbed a pair of socks, too, and marveled briefly at how tiny they were. She was a very little girl. A very little and very *sick* girl. Hopper hoped that the vomiting was over, because he didn't know what he would do if she got dehydrated. He walked back into the small bathroom and placed her clothes beside her on the tile.

"I'm gonna go grab you some more water. Spit and rinse then get dressed, okay?"

Eleven nodded, and Hopper grabbed the old cup and moved to the kitchen. He was glad that, now that Eleven was more aware of her situation, she seemed less clingy. Or maybe the fever was just getting so bad she wasn't thinking much anymore. He really couldn't tell.

He returned to her within three minutes, and she was seated haphazardly on the bathroom rug. She looked drained.

"You ready to get back in bed?" Hopper asked softly, looking down at his sick daughter. She looked up at him with hazy eyes before reaching her arms up. He quirked an eyebrow.

"Can't walk." She mumbled, and Hopper hated just how rough her voice sounded. She coughed then, and it was a deep, wracking cough that shook her whole body - and the whole house. Something shattered in the other room. Hopper sighed, but didn't dwell much on

it. Something else needed his full attention right now.

"Okay, up ya go," He grumbled, leaning down and grabbing El under her arms. He lifted her up onto his hip and she leaned her face in the place between his face and neck. "Sheesh, kid, you are just burning up." He mumbled to himself. No way was this healthy - it had to be higher than it was earlier, and that was already pretty high. Too high.

He put that out of his mind, too, and Eleven was asleep before he tucked her in.

Hopper did not sleep any more than thirty minutes at a time more that night. Well. That morning. His last two hours of sweet, sweet sleep were spent tossing and turning in his bed, trying hard not to listen to the coughs and whines coming from his feverish daughter from the next room over. He couldn't listen, because if he did, all he would think of would be Sara when it all started to go downhill. It had started like something simple, and he and his wife had thought nothing of it - Sara would be fine soon, because children always are. Except she wasn't. She kept getting worse, and worse, and worse until one day, she just *wasn't* anymore. One day, it all stopped, and that was the day that she - That was when she -

Hopper sat up abruptly, startled from sleep for the third time in the past hour. Nope, not going there. Not tonight. Or, rather, not today. It was 6:32 AM, only thirty minutes before he normally rose, and so he decided it wouldn't hurt anything to get up now, even if he was exhausted to the core. He couldn't stand lying there in relative silence any longer, because if he did, he may start to fully panic, and Eleven didn't deserve that.

Except, he couldn't get up, because it was only now that his brain caught up to his awareness that he realized Eleven was lying beside him, her hot little body pressed as close as possible to his side. He frowned, because her fever still felt way too high for his taste, but he wasn't too distressed because she felt a little cooler than she had two hours ago.

Hopper slowly eased back down into a lying position and turned on his side to look at Eleven. Even though she was sick, and her cheeks

were flushed with bright red fever, and her lips were parted greatly from the effort of breathing, she still looked so peaceful. There was a chill in the air from the cold February air outdoors and the lack of central heat and air, but it wasn't cold - only chilly enough to want to stay under the covers for as long as possible. Paired with that were the pale pink and gold sunrise hues that were being cast into the room from his partially boarded up window, directly illuminating the tiny little curls that framed Eleven's flushed face. Hopper smiled just thinking about how much her hair had grown in the last month and a half, the dark brown loops now soft and bouncy on the top of her head, just long enough to stick a bow in if desired.

Hopper fought the desire to kiss the twelve-year-old's forehead. Instead he reached a loving hand out and petted some of the unruly curls down, and she stirred.

"Mm," She grumbled, her peaceful face immediately going into one of pain. She curled in on herself and whined, her little lips going into a pout. Hopper tensed.

"Hop," Eleven mumbled. She cracked her eyes open at him and sniffed. "Don't feel good,"

Hopper laughed a tiny pained laugh and reached out to pet her again.

"No wonder. Any better than earlier?" Hopper asked. He saw her face screw up even more into that little concentrating face before she responded. She shook her head.

"Belly," She said simply. Paused. Continued. "Chest. Eye-balls."

She was listing where it hurt, Hopper realized, and he gave a sympathetic little sigh.

"I know, darlin', I know. It hurts everywhere, huh." He said, and Eleven nodded. He saw little tears in her eyes as her chin quivered. She hadn't opened her eyes again. "Go on back to sleep, Ellie, okay? I gotta go to work, but..." He trailed off. He didn't want to go to work. At least, he didn't think he could right now. Not when Eleven was this bad.

On the other hand....

"I gotta go to work, but I'll be home soon, okay? You just send a message to me if you need anything. Just h - e - l - p." He knocked on her forehead the morse-code message, and that earned him the tiniest little giggle. "And I'll be right home. Got it?"

Eleven's eyebrows unscrunched a little, and Hopper knew she was fading fast.

"Got it." She mumbled, her voice sleepy and far away.

Hopper gave in and kissed her forehead before he left.

"Hey, Flo," Hopper sighed, walking into the office. He didn't bother to hang up his hat. He had rehearsed this a hundred times on the way there, and he wasn't going to stay long enough to mess it up. He took a deep breath. "Good morning."

Flo looked up from her desk and gave him a very, very wary look.

"You're early. And you said good morning." She narrowed her eyes. "What do you need this time?"

Hopper sighed and gave her his best "you caught me" smile.

"What can I say," He shrugged, "You always know exactly what's going on."

Flo crossed her arms and gave him *the look*, and Hopper decided it would be best to continue.

"So my sister had a, uh, a family emergency yesterday morning," He started, trying to remember the story he came up with. He had to get it perfect - even if it was unlikely, any hole in his story could alert the lab of Eleven's presence. "So she left her little girl with me, and uh.. She came down with some bug last night, and I've been up all night with her."

Flo gave him a "yeah sure" look. "And?"

"And I need to go back and keep an eye on 'er. And.." He stopped. Paused for dramatic effect. Sighed and looked at his feet as if he were embarrassed. Well, he really was a little embarrassed of his lack of knowledge, because he had been a dad once. Actually, he had been a Daddy once, and it embarrassed him to think of just how fast all of his prior knowledge had left him. "Flo, I have no clue how to take care of a kid anymore. What do I even need to feed her?"

Flo laughed. Straight out laughed, right in Hopper's face. If the story had been true, Hopper may have been offended deep in his heart. But it wasn't, so he wasn't either.

"Jim Hopper, you never fail to surprise me." She said, shaking her head. He gave her a face. "Alright, hold your horses,"

And then Flo was making Hopper a list of what to get from the store, and he hadn't even asked.

"Go ahead and put a trash can by the bed, don't want any messes if she's sick again. Kids always have more in 'em than you'd expect. And don't you dare get her that offbrand Sprite, the real stuff is what that poor little girl deserves. Mama's gone, sick as a dog, and stuck with ol' *Jim Hopper* for the week. Send her my condolences." Flo was laughing, and Hopper smiled back at her. She had no idea how accurate her description was, other than the fact that it wasn't just a week. It was indefinite.

"Thanks again, Flo," Hopper grinned as the older lady ushered him out the door. Flo smiled back and patted the taller man's back.

"Don't you worry your pretty little head about it, Hop. Just be sure to let her watch something other than your old soaps," She winked at the last part, and Hopper was sure she knew something she shouldn't, but she kept going before he could ponder it. "And don't forget to tell her I send my love,"

Hopper smiled at her as she closed the door, and that smile instantly faded as he looked down at the list she gave him. He had to get these things and get home *fast*. It was starting to snow, just a little bit, and he had to get home before the roads got bad or there was no way Eleven would ever forgive him. Or remember to blow her nose.

Or make it to the toilet to throw up.

Hopper unlocked his car quickly and threw his keys into the ignition as he eyeballed the list.

- 1. 2 liter of Sprite*
- 2. Saltine crackers*
- 3. Nyquil*
- 4. Get that girl a teddy or something, she needs a good surprise today*
- 5. Campbell's Chicken and Noodle Soup*
- 6. Her favorite candy to give her when she starts to feel a little better*
- 7. Extra-Soft 2 ply toilet paper because you'll run out of tissues real fast*
- 8. For the love of all things Holy, get that baby some Pepto*
- 9. Jello and applesauce, she may be able to hold them down a little better than other things*

And Jim Hopper, don't you dare come back here tomorrow unless that little girl has gone home.

Jim smiled from his place in the front seat and started the engine. Flo always would look out for him and anyone he was with. She had even grown fond of Joyce, or at least pretended to, when the two were obviously sweet on each other. Hopper put his foot to the gas and started off to the supermarket with the smile yet to fade from his face.

It was nine AM when Hopper arrived back home, and the temperature outside was dropping rapidly. On top of the items on Flo's list, he had also purchased a space heater to place in Eleven's room, because there was no way she was warm enough in there with only three throw blankets and long sleeved pajamas. He was about to knock when he realized Eleven probably wasn't in a position where she could open the door, and so he thought better of it and fished the

only existing key out of his pocket. There were a few difficult locks, but he was able to manage it - meaning later he'd have to up his game on the protection of this house, but fine for now. He stepped in with his bags and shut the door instantly to block out the cold.

"Ellie, I'm back," He shouted. It was a soft shout, and he was greeted with nothing but a peculiar sneeze, one that was both loud and small at the same time, and one that knocked the unlocked-door back open behind him. He shut it and looked around at the mess, seeing nothing but fallen and smashed items, including, but not limited to, plates, bowls, a lamp or two, every book under their ownership, and a few magazines ripped to shreds. Hopper was sure that with the intensity of Eleven's sneezing and vomiting she had broken every dish within a three mile radius, or at least caused some what of a ruckus. Hopper turned the locks and walked quietly into his room, where he found Eleven curled up under every blanket he owned (No doubt brought there herself without moving a muscle) and with a thumb stuck in her mouth. Blood was dripping freely down her red face, but she didn't look very distraught anymore. Hopper walked over and sat on the bed beside her, setting his bags down on the floor. He petted her curls gently away from her sweaty forehead and she stirred, fever clouded eyes looking up and barely meeting his. She quickly plopped her thumb from her mouth, tucking the blankets up around her neck more.

"Hey, sweet girl," He smiled. She blinked. "I got some things for you,"

Hopper then leaned over and picked up the bear before wiggling it at his twelve year olds face. She giggled weakly and he pushed it into her arms before moving to the next thing. Hopper smiled, too, because her fever seemed to be much lower than it was earlier. The worst had to be over, and he was 98% positive now that she would be alright compared to the 45% of last night.

Within ten minutes, he had her up and was slowly coaxing her to eat applesauce (This time stopping when she said she couldn't stomach any more), had wiped the blood from her face, and was settled in reading her a story.

She wasn't better yet, not anywhere close to it. But she soon would be, and Hopper knew that. He and his little girl would be just fine.